

## ***Flooding Health and Safety Tips***

### **Water Safety**

- Protect yourself and your family from flooding problems by being prepared.
- When in doubt, if the water is CLOUDY, ODOROUS, COLORED - DO NOT DRINK THE WATER!
- Do not use water from a private well that has been or is flooded. If you are not certain about the safety of your water supply you should have the well tested for bacteria. Until the test results are known, there are procedures you can follow to ensure safe drinking water.
- Drink bottled water or water from a known, safe, source. If necessary, you can make water safe to drink by boiling the water for five minutes.
- **Whenever you notice a change in water quality, or anytime there's been flooding near your well, have your well tested for bacteria contamination. If contamination is found, disinfect your well/water supply.**

**Do NOT swim or bathe in rivers, streams, creeks, or lakes in flooded areas!**

### **Food Safety**

- When in doubt, do not eat suspicious food.
- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water. Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water.
- Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the can labels, wash the cans, and then disinfect them with a solution consisting of six ounces of bleach to one gallon of water. Re-label your cans, including the expiration date, with a marker.
- Food containers with screw-caps, snap-lids, crimped caps (soda pop bottles), twist caps, flip tops, and home canned foods should be discarded if they have come into contact with flood water because they cannot be disinfected.
- **For infants, use ONLY pre-prepared canned baby formula that requires no added water, rather than powdered formulas prepared with treated water.**
- If your refrigerator or freezer has been without power for a period of time, all stored items should be carefully checked. Perishable food left at room temperature for more than two hours should be discarded. Frozen foods

that have thawed should be discarded if not consumed immediately or kept refrigerated.

## **Sewer/Waste Water Concerns**

- Private septic systems that have been flooded are no longer reliable. Portable toilets or other appropriate facilities should be used. Remember, you should not have contact with water that has been contaminated with human wastes.
- If water and sewage disposal are not working, use portable toilets, or facilities at the emergency site.
- Sewage may back flow from your septic or municipal system through floor drains, toilets, etc. Any affected areas, such as basements, must be cleaned and disinfected, as with a chlorine solution. Anything that cannot be cleaned should be thrown out.

## **Garbage Precautions**

- Place household garbage, like food waste, in waterproof containers. Typically, your municipality will set up temporary disposal sites that should be used. It is important to remove household garbage every four days during the disaster.
- Garbage can attract animals and disease-bearing insects. If possible, store garbage in a rigid container.
- We recommend that you keep records of all of the items you discard for insurance purposes.

## **Injury Prevention**

Injuries are a major safety concern when flooding occurs. You need to take appropriate precautions to avoid injury to you or family members.

- Electrical Safety
  - Do not attempt to restore or work on power sources without first contacting your utility. Homes that are flooded should have their power disconnected by the utility company.
  - Emergency generators should ONLY be used in well-ventilated areas. Otherwise, carbon monoxide, a colorless, odorless gas, can build up with fatal consequences.
- Physical Hazards
  - Avoid wading in water without proper foot protection. Broken glass, metal fragments, and other debris may be submerged in the flooded area.

- Wear proper eyewear, gloves, and other protective equipment when cleaning an area. If you are cut or punctured, contact your physician or local health department as soon as possible. Tetanus vaccinations may be necessary.

### **Increased Insect Activity**

- Use insect repellent when outside. Mosquitoes and other insects can transmit diseases such as West Nile Virus and encephalitis. Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully when applying repellents containing DEET to children.
- Stagnant water is a breeding place for disease carrying mosquitoes. Remove standing water from tires, dishes, cans, or building material.

### **Future Concerns -- Mold**

Many people are allergic to mold. Young children, the elderly, and people with asthma and/or other medical issues can be affected by mold. The following recommendations should be considered:

- Household furnishings, carpets, etc. must be cleaned and dried as soon as possible to avoid mold growth. Discard furnishings such as carpet, drapes, stuffed toys, upholstered furniture, mattresses, wicker furniture, ceiling tiles, and other items that can't be dried completely. Keep records of all of the items you discard for insurance purposes.
- Remove and replace wet drywall and insulation.
- Inspect and clean all appliances, freezers, stoves and refrigerators that have been in contact with floodwater.
- Have heating and ventilation professionals check heating and cooling systems for mold contamination.

Inspect for mold growth through out the house, including attics, basements and crawlspaces.

### **Correcting Water Damage and Cleaning Up**

- Seal all leaks (ceilings, walls, foundations) and correct improper surface drainage. Reduce moisture generation in crawl spaces by ventilation or covering the crawl space floor with a moisture resistant material such as polyethylene.
- Wash surfaces and floors, first with a detergent, and then to disinfect them, with a household chlorine bleach solution. Use four to six ounces of bleach per gallon of water. The bleach solution should stay in contact with the affected surface for several minutes before rinsing off with clean water. It may be necessary to repeat this process several times for items that were grossly contaminated.

- Only individuals who are necessary for clean-up should be in the affected areas.
- **Persons with respiratory health problems (e.g., asthma, emphysema) should NOT perform the clean-up. Children and pets should not be allowed in these areas.**
- When using a bleach solution, open windows to provide good ventilation. Boots and rubber gloves should be worn at all times. In cases where rigorous splashing of contaminated water may occur, a dust mask and eye protection should also be worn.

For more information, contact Grant County Health Department at  
(608) 723-6416